

Sustainable management of water resources is crucial

This year, World Water Day is celebrated on 22 March 2012 and will be focusing specifically on water and food security. The Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa (IWMSA) wants to emphasise the fact that we need to pay special attention to the sustainable management of our freshwater resources, especially in terms of our tenuous hold on food security.

"As in many areas of our excessively consumer orientated lifestyles, we seldom stop to think about what water resources are used in the production of our food. For instance, whilst around 1 500 litres of water is used in the production of one kilogram of wheat, 15 000 litres of water is used to produce one kilogram of beef. It takes a substantial amount of water to produce the food crops required to feed herds of farmed animals, as well as to process the produce from those animals, such as milk and cheese, and there is an ever increasing demand for meat," says Stan Jewaskiewitz, president of the IWMSA.

One third of food production is wasted

"Other factors in farming which eventually impact on water supply are contamination in the form of chemical pesticides, for example, which are often overused, and farming's contribution to the problem of climate change especially in respect of damaging greenhouse gases."

The United Nations has decided to focus on the theme of Water and Food Security for World Water Day this year, a theme wholeheartedly endorsed by the IWMSA. According to Jewaskiewitz the demand for food will spiral upwards at an alarming rate. "The presently frightening scenario is that famine stricken countries and starving people notwithstanding, around 30% or almost one third of the world's food production is consigned to waste. Many factors contribute to this loss, including loss at source or in transportation from the fields, as well as ultimately, and far too often, the end consumer who is wasteful as a result of not being aware of the processes required to produce their consumables."

Farming methods must be explored

Jewaskiewitz says we simply have to cut back on our excessive food waste by changing our attitudes as consumers and becoming more aware of cause and effect; we need to pay attention to how and what we consume, make better food choices and avoid wastage at all cost. Commercially, crop diversity and integrated farming methods need to be explored. One such fascinating example is the integration of rice and fish farming in the paddy fields of Asia which is proving extremely effective on a number of levels.